

9

A SERMON.

1841

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THE IMPORTANCE
OF
IMPROVING OUR PROBATIONARY STATE.

A SERMON

DELIVERED IN THE WESLEYAN CHAPEL,

Basse-Ville, Calais,

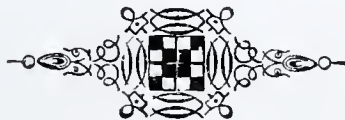
ON SUNDAY EVENING, AUGUST 15th, 1841,

BY J. PHILP,

AND PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

"Man is the maker of immortal fates."

YOUNG.



CALAIS,


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TO THE CONGREGATION WORSHIPPING IN THE WESLEYAN
CHAPEL, BASSE-VILLE, CALAIS, THE FOLLOWING
SERMON, DELIVERED IN THE MIDST OF
DEATH AND OF MOURNING, IS
MOST RESPECTFULLY
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The following Sermon—if it may claim the name—was delivered to an attentive and deeply affected Congregation, in the Wesleyan Chapel, Basse-Ville, Calais, at a time when some of the families in the Congregation had been visited by death. At the earnest request of some of the respected hearers, it is published. The Preacher is fully aware that, as a sermon, it has no claim to elegance of composition, nor to methodical accuracy. The circumstances in which it was delivered, the solemn and it is hoped, beneficial results produced at the time, must be considered as the reasons which called for its publication; and not any superiority in the Sermon itself. As the Author had nothing at the time but short notes, he cannot vouch for every sentence being the same,—but he has done the best his memory would admit. He sends it to the press with great diffidence, but in the earnest hope *that it may, by the blessing of God, be the humble means of good.*

Sept. 7th, 1841.

J. P.

A SERMON.

*Watsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it
with thy might; for there is no work, nor
device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the
grave, whither thou goest.*

ECCLESIASTES, IX. 10.

Faithful and seasonable are the admonitions of the word of God. Here we are regarded as rational and accountable beings, acting on the stage of time and of probation, in reference to an unchangeable eternity. Here the important work we have to perform preparatory to a happy immortality, is laid down in the plainest terms; and we are urged to its performance by the most powerful motives—motives, which should alarm the careless, rouse the sleeper from his pleasing, but deceptive dream, and stimulate the watchful Christian to the most active diligence, that he may be found of Christ in peace. Among other considerations—we are taught that life is fleeting; that death is swiftly approaching; that an awful eternity is near; that, “The night cometh when no man can work.”

So that the work of salvation being neglected in time, will be left undone for ever !

Such, my friends, are the solemn truths which our text lays before us this evening. As rational beings, soon to die ; soon to come to the judgment ; soon to have our destinies unchangeably fixed for ever ; let us call our thoughts from the trifles of the world, and here, in the presence of God, solemnly and prayerfully consider.—

I. The work to be done;

II. The manner in which we are to do it;

III. The solemn reasons by which the exhortation in the text is urged upon us.

I. We consider the work to be done. As to the nature of this work, we shall not misunderstand it, when we remember there are but two eternal states after death ; a heaven of holiness and bliss, and a hell of inexpressible torment ; and that the enjoyment of the former, or the misery of the latter, to us as individuals, depends upon the state in which death finds us. In our natural and sinful state, we are unfit for heaven, and only fit for the punishment of hell. It is now our privilege to prepare for the former, and escape the latter. The work, then, is plainly that of preparing for heaven. This is the great work enjoined on us throughout the sacred Scriptures ; and though we cannot possibly save ourselves, but must be saved through the merits of Christ alone, yet there are certain conditions to be complied with by us, both as penitent sinners, and believing Christians, without which our salvation or meetness for

heaven will never be accomplished. Let me call your attention—

1. To the necessary work of *repentance*. Repentance is a “godly sorrow” for sin, produced by deep conviction, and leading us to turn away from sin, with earnest prayer to God, for pardoning mercy through Jesus Christ. The language of the Publican—“God be merciful to me a sinner”—is the prayer of the true penitent.

Repentance is urged upon us on the ground of our being *sinners*, and therefore it is of *sin*, we are to repent. Some persons repent because their sins are brought to the light, or because they fear the threatened punishment; but where there is true conviction for sin, as that which God hates, for which Christ suffered and died, and that which insults a God of mercy and love; sin will appear as “exceeding sinful,” and the language of the true penitent will be that of the Psalmist; “I will be sorry for my sin.”

This repentance God requires of us in order to our salvation. He tells us by an inspired apostle: “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” (1 PET., v. 6.) And the same apostle says; “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” (ACTS III. 19.) The Saviour has given us a striking example of true repentance, as leading to the pardon of sin, in the case of the Publican, of whom he says, “He went down to his house justified;” and adds, “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (LUKE XVIII. 14.) And who can read the awful sentence passed upon the impenitent, without

feeling deeply conscious that impenitence will exclude them from the kingdom of God? “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (LUKE XIII. 3.)

Impenitence necessarily involves our exclusion from the favour of God and the salvation of the gospel; not only as being an insult offered to God, but a rejection of the Saviour, whose office it is “to bind up the broken-hearted.” The sinner will never submit to be saved through Christ alone, till he is brought to the foot-stool of mercy by true repentance.

2. *We are to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, for salvation.* The penitent sinner is to cast himself, with all his sins and guilt, upon the atoning “Lamb of God,” by an act of humble trust or confidence in the all sufficiency of his great atoning sacrifice. He is to refuse every other prop, every other source of hope and help; he is to embrace him with the heart, as the only “name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (ACTS IV. 12.) To the performance of this we are commanded—we are, by the gracious help of the Holy Spirit, who enlightens our minds and leads us to the Saviour, to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, with the promise, “thou shalt be saved.” This command shows us we are not to be neuter in the work of our salvation. If God commands, it is ours to obey; and we are certain that no one can, either repent, or believe for us: therefore it becomes a personal work; personal obedience to a plain command. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” (JOHN VI. 29.)

The importance of faith, as a condition in the Gospel

scheme, is seen in the promise of pardon and salvation made to the believing soul, and the awful denunciations against the unbelieving. “He,” says Christ, “that believeth on the Son of God, hath life.” Peter, when preaching to Cornelius and his company, says, “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” (Acts x. 43.) Unbelief incurs the wrath of God, and rejects the atonement made for sin; and hence — “He that believeth not on the Son of God, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

3. As believers, we are to *work out our salvation before God*. Our having repented, believed, and being soundly converted to God, will be all vain, unless we follow up the path of Christian duty, with persevering zeal. Here our hand will find important work to be done, which we may notice under the general heads of—

(1) *Entire and constant devotedness to God*. The Christian is no longer to live to himself, but “to him who died for us, and rose again.” He is to present himself “a living sacrifice”—daily yielding up himself to God, constantly obeying his laws, and cheerfully submitting to his dispensations; ever seeking his honour and glory, who has bought us “with a price.” The believer alone is prepared to comply with the injunction: “Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

(2) *We must use every means to “grow in grace.”* We are to advance in the image of God, which is “righteousness and true holiness; we are to be” conformed to the image of his Son;” we are to be *holy*.

This great object can never be achieved without means. We are to live in the constant exercise of “faith on the Son of God;” we are to deny ourselves and take the cross daily; we are to live in the spirit of watchfulness and earnest prayer, searching the Scriptures with prayer for the light of the Holy Spirit to shine on our minds, and show us the things of God; and duly attending the ordinances of God’s house, as means of promoting our increase in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. If this be not the case, we shall soon measure our steps back into the world and sin. “Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching.”

3. Then we are to be employed in acts of *justice*, and *benevolence* towards all our fellow-men. Need I urge the *first* of these on *you*? Surely every one present who professes Christianity, acts uprightly! If not, then he is a disgrace to the Christian name! But to the followers of Christ, there is something more than the bare requirements of justice—there are the claims of benevolence; the sick, the poor, the fatherless, and the widow will all attract the sympathy of those who love and imitate Christ; nor will that sympathy end in mere feeling, but lead to *acts* of benevolence, as well as *words* of pity. But the *souls* of men have a peculiar claim on us, as they are immortal and of infinite value!—What work have we to do here! “To save poor souls out of the fire”—precious, immortal souls, going into eternity! There is no place for idleness here. Oh! had we, my Christian friends, been diligent in this work, how many who are

now far from God, going the broad way to destruction, would have been gathered into the bosom of the church and saved by grace! Let us stir ourselves up to greater diligence and zeal, in the work which cost the Saviour his precious blood.

II. Let us do the work our “hand findeth to do” with our *might*. Here then, we are taught *how this work should be performed*.

1. It must be earnestly and diligently *sought after*. It is the work our hand *findeth to do*. Men in business, wait not till their work comes to them, but they go and seek it. Many think they have little or nothing to do in the work of salvation, till they search out the state of their hearts, and look at their past lives, and compare these with the requirements of God’s word and the holiness of that heaven, to which they vainly thought they were going. Many, too, in the Christian church, think they have but little assigned them to do in the extension of the Redeemer’s cause. Let them *seek*, and they will find that they have *much* to do for God! You will find it in your family circle, among your shop-mates, among your neighbours, among the sick and dying, and among the sheep of Christ’s fold. Be it remembered, that only those who are willing to work, seek after it; and only those do it cheerfully, when they find it to do.

2. This work must be done *earnestly*, or it is not done with the *might*. Look at the mere *pretender* in religion—the formalist. He professes to repent; but he never wept bitterly and groaned the sinner’s plea, “God be merciful to me:” he professes to have believed in

Christ, but his faith is not the trust of the *heart*, and the submission of the soul to Christ as a King: he still trusts to something he can do by way of merit. He professes to love God; but how cold his affection! The world shares his heart with the Saviour; and such love, God accepts not. He professes to serve God; but tries to serve God and mammon; his service, like his affections, is divided; and the Saviour says: "No man can serve two masters." His *heart* is not right with God.

How different, where there is a real work of grace. The mind is enlightened to see the vast importance of salvation, the worth of the soul, and the claims of the Saviour on our best affections; the great work is entered into, in all its departments, with vigour and determination; sin is bitterly repented of and forsaken; Christ is received by faith with the whole heart; and God is loved supremely, from a deep and experimental consciousness of his first love. There the work of God will be done with the *might*: no difficulty will be too great to surmount, no cross too heavy to bear. The importance of the work outweighs every other consideration; and thus the course is *run*, the battle is *fought*, and the faith *maintained*.

3. But to do it with the might, is to do it *without delay*. The man who delays his work as long as possible, shows a reluctance in doing it at all, and cannot be said to do it with his *might*. How prone are we to act thus in the things of the soul! But how culpable! If we look at our own interest, we see the importance of the work—the soul to be saved, or lost for ever! The glory

of God is to be promoted, and the Saviour's dying purposes to be accomplished! Shall we delay? The salvation of souls, who are daily perishing, claims your *present* exertions. Who would sit at ease to see a fellow-creature fall into a pit of destruction, or to be consumed in devouring flames, if he could afford him any help? See a world lying in wickedness, and hastening to eternal death! and hasten.—Oh! hasten to “save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.” It will be too late to put forth your hand, when he is gone beyond your reach, into the fire that is not quenched!—

III. Look then, at the solemn considerations by which this exhortation is urged upon our attention—

1. *We are going to the grave.* Solemn thought! To “the house appointed for all living”—where, “the dust shall return to the earth as it was”—where the “worms destroy this body”—where these active limbs will cease to move, and these eyes cease to sparkle, and this tongue cease to speak; and where our dust must remain, till the morning of the glorious resurrection.—To the grave? But where is the grave of the soul? Does it slumber with the body in the silent tomb? No! The thought is absurd; it is unscriptural! The apostle desired “to depart, and to be with Christ, which,” he says, “is far better.” Is Christ then in the grave? No! he is in heaven; and for the pious “to be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord.” There is the place of the righteous; received into mansions of glory; to the “rest which remains to the people of God.” But where is the place of the sinner?—The soul who has

neglected this great work of preparation for heaven? Not the grave; but “driven away in his wickedness,” into his *own place*—to join the company of the lost, in that “outer darkness, where is wailing and gnashing of teeth” The place of the righteous is heaven; the place of the sinner is hell!

Think, my friends, think for a moment—to the grave, we are *going!*—to eternity, we are *going!* This is not a dream—not a fiction, but a *reality*. Every day brings us nearer; every hour, every moment hurls us onward to our final destiny! Time flies, and death approaches! See your neighbours and friends pass before you to the grave! During the past week we have had to follow to the tomb, one of our neighbours, who was cut down in the days of her youth; but snatched—as we hope—by the great mercy of God, from the brink of ruin! To day, we have witnessed the funeral scene of the beloved wife of one of our friends present, and the mother of a family, of whose happiness there is room to hope. Another of our young friends, who has often joined us here, in the worship of God, now lies in death, waiting for interment!—They have gone to the world of spirits, and we are following them, as fast as time can carry us! How important, then, the exhortation of the text—to do the great work assigned us, before we come to the grave!

2. Then all our *precious time* will be gone for ever. This is the time of our probation—the time of our repentance—the time to prepare for heaven: but when we come to the grave, all this valuable time is gone! The time for thy tears and prayers of penitence, and the

time for thy salvation, Oh, my fellow-sinner! will then be gone!—for ever gone! The time for thee, O feeble follower of Christ! to improve in personal holiness, to do the work assigned thee in the church, and to snatch the soul of thy neighbour from eternal ruin, will then be gone for ever! Behold! “The night cometh when no man can work.” There, is the grave! There is eternity! Yonder comes the Judge, the Son of man to call the nations to his tribunal! Behold the shades of evening gathering round you! and time, precious time, running out! This day, this hour may be your last! “Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

3. *When we come to the grave, then all our opportunities and means of salvation cease.*

“There is no work.” The great work of preparing for heaven cannot be accomplished there. There is no repentance—no throne of grace to which we may come and pour out our tears and supplications for mercy. The living advocate pleads not for the dead—the soul’s eternal destiny is fixed. If till then we have neglected our souls—if we have neglected to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to visit the afflicted, to relieve the distressed, to seek the souls of our fellow-men, and to use every means to extend the Redeemer’s kingdom, it will be too late.—Work, therefore, *while it is day*.

In the grave there is no *device*. No plans nor schemes for improvement in divine things can there be formed, nor measures for the good of our fellow-men, be carried into effect. We have but one plan of salvation here, and

that must be carried into effect in *time*—not in the grave—not in eternity. As to the doctrine of a purgatory, it is not in the Bible ; it is not of God. If then there is no device there—no scheme by which the sinner can escape the wrath of God and prepare for heaven, our wisdom is to hasten to improve by the plans which God has formed for our happiness, before we descend into the grave ; before we go to our “long home.”

In the grave there is no *knowledge*. Not that the soul is deprived of intelligence at death, but that knowledge comes too late which comes when the power to execute it, is gone. The sinner will know the wrath of God, the infinite worth of the soul, and the glorious remedy of the Gospel against which he has sinned ; but he cannot know God experimentally as a God of love and mercy ; for all access to him is for ever denied. He cannot know peace, nor joy, nor heavenly glory, in that place where hope can never come.

In the grave there is no *wisdom*. Wisdom is knowledge reduced to practice ; and is seen only in our complying with the exhortation of the text : but now death and the grave have put a period to probation ; for in the grave “there is no work.” The wish then to have our time again, will be vain ; and all our blessed opportunities are gone with time. The wisdom which comes from above is for ever placed beyond the reach of the lost, and their folly will be a source of unavailing pain and remorse to them ; for “Shame shall be the promotion of fools.”

Thus, my friends, “the end of all things is at hand,” when the awful declaration of the Saviour shall be fully

accomplished:—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.—And behold," says he, "I come quickly and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." (REV. XXII. 11, 12.)

Hear this, ye who are members of the church of Christ! Let me remind you that you have each your work to do for God. None are exempt—and Christ will not excuse you in the day of his coming! "Be ye therefore ready for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

To those who are not decided on the part of Christ, what shall I say? You have a great work to do; and it is time to begin it. Some of you are young and in the bloom of health: but see your young friends dying around you! You too, are hastening to the grave! Give to the greatest and best of beings, your first and best days: this, and this alone can render you happy. Some of you have neglected your work till a late period. Let me beseech you to begin it *now*. You are on the verge of the grave, but hope is not gone; mercy has not flown for ever! Now, the Saviour is ready to receive you, and to save you, but soon, *very soon* he will be your impartial and righteous Judge! "O, that ye were wise, that ye understood this, that ye would consider your latter end!"



